

MEDIA RELEASE

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Secretary of State Health Issue

Cheyenne, Wyoming - Governor Dave Freudenthal and Secretary of State Max Maxfield held a joint press conference today in the rotunda of the Capitol. The conference was held to provide an explanation of a health issue of the Secretary of State and to answer questions regarding the Secretary's recent diagnosis.

Secretary Maxfield explained that approximately three weeks ago he was diagnosed with Benign Essential Tremors (BET), a condition which can cause tremors of the hands, extremities or head. Secretary Maxfield said, "Although I would prefer to have no health concerns at all, I was relieved to discover that my tremors are not a sign of MS or Parkinson's Disease and can be easily treated with medication."

Freudenthal offered his support saying, "I'm here to express my confidence that Max is more than fully capable of doing the job for which he was elected," Freudenthal said. "I'm just as confident in his ability to fill in for me if I'm incapacitated."

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Dr. Reed Shafer, Secretary Maxfield's physician, also attended the conference and answered questions. Dr. Shafer explained that Essential Tremor is a relatively benign condition, effecting movement or voice quality but with no other effects. There may be difficulty holding or using small objects such as silverware or writing utensils. "Essential Tremor affects fine motor skills, not large motor, so makes it difficult to pick up a pen and sign a check for example, as opposed to driving a car, which poses no problem," Reed stated. Reed Shafer is a neurologist who practices with Cheyenne Medical Specialists, P.C. He received his education at the University of Michigan and his clinical training at Northwestern University and the University of Michigan.

Maxfield said that he decided to actually have a press conference because he wanted everyone to know the facts and not wonder or speculate about his condition. "Some days I am fine, but on other days it is obvious that my hands shake. Since I am up in front of the public so frequently, I thought it best to explain the condition to everyone. I feel comfortable letting people know what this is. I'm not even sure it's newsworthy," Maxfield said.

"I was so pleased to know that this will in no way affect my duties as Secretary of State, and I will be able to continue full steam ahead because I am loving my new role as Secretary of State," Maxfield said.

All five State Elected Officials joined Maxfield at the news conference. State Treasurer Joe Meyer added, "I've worked with Max for 25 years and Max is Max and it is business as usual."

Essential Tremor

Essential tremor is a nerve disorder in which shakes occur, without an identifiable cause, when a person is moving or trying to move.

All people have some degree of tremor during movement. The shaking normally involves mainly the hands. Stress, fatigue, anger, fear, caffeine, cigarettes and some types of medication may temporarily worsen this type of tremor to the point that it becomes visible to the naked eye.

Essential tremor is the most common form of abnormal tremor. It resembles an exaggerated shaking. Essential tremor is worsened by the same factors that worsen normal tremor. Although the cause is unknown, new research suggest that one part of the brain called the cerebellum may not appear to function properly in the patient's with essential tremor. The cerebellum is the part of the brain that coordinates muscle movements and provides accuracy and harmony to voluntary movement. Nevertheless, no brain lesions have been identified in patients with essential tremor.

There is evidence of several different types of essential tremor (such as young-onset essential tremor or essential tremor with head tremor). These types differ in their response to treatment.

If an essential tremor occurs in more than one member of a family it is called a familial tremor. It appears that essential tremor has some genetic basis, not only because of the hereditary pattern observed in some families, but also because an identical twin (that shares the same gene) of a person with essential tremor is twice as likely as a paternal twin (who has different genes) to have essential tremor. Since some identical twins do not share the condition, environmental factors must play a role as well. Essential tremors can occur at any age, but are most common in people older than age 65.

Essential tremor is a relatively benign condition, effecting movement or voice quality, but with no other effects. It involves a rhythmic moderately rapid tremor of voluntary muscles. Purposeful movements may make the tremors worse, while avoiding hand movements may suppress the tremor completely. There may be difficulty holding or using such small objects as silverware or writing utensils.

Over time the tremors may effect the hands, arms, head, voice box, eyelids or other muscles. Essential tremor rarely involves the legs or feet. It may start in one body part, but can progress into other parts.

The tremor may be occasional, episodic or intermittent. It may effect the head, hands, arms, eyelids or voice. It may not effect both sides of the body equally. It worsens with voluntary movement or emotional stress. It disappears during sleep and typically improves with alcohol.

There is no diagnostic or laboratory test for essential tremor. The diagnosis is based on the patient's history and a physical and neurological examination revealing tremor on voluntary movement and no other abnormalities.

Some testing may be done to rule out other causes of tremor, such as excessive caffeine, tobacco use, alcohol withdrawal, the use of certain medications (such as asthma drugs, some antidepressants, Lithium and some antiseizure drugs), hyperthyroidism, pheochromocytoma, Wilson's disease (A rare condition in which copper accumulates in the brain and liver) and other disorders.

Routine laboratory tests and brain imaging studies such as CT scan of the head, MRI, X-ray or other tests are usually normal and are not routinely performed.

An essential tremor is not a dangerous condition, but can be annoying and embarrassing.

If it is severe, essential tremor may mildly interfere with activity, such as fine motor skills like writing. Speech is occasionally involved. Medications used to treat essential tremor can cause some side effects.

Counseling, exercising and other techniques to reduce emotional stress, which may worsen the condition, may be of some benefit.

There are many medications that are found helpful by many patients and in extreme situations surgery can be performed.